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Buckeye Knoll analysis plan announced by Corps of Engineers

GALVESTON — A decision on analysis of the collection and disposition of the human remains found at the Buckeye Knoll archeological site near Victoria, Texas has been announced by the US Army Corps of Engineers, Galveston District. The district conducted excavations at the site to comply with the National Historic Preservation Act.

The site contains the largest Early Archaic cemetery ever found west of the Mississippi River. This unique cemetery is just one part of highly significant archeological materials found at the site which represent over 10,000 years of human history on the Texas coast.

“My decision balances the diverse concerns of Native Americans and the archeological community to the greatest extent possible,” said Col. Leonard Waterworth, District Engineer and Commander of the Galveston District. In the process of developing a treatment plan, state and federal agencies, Native American tribes, the archeological community, and the general public were consulted. The Corps concluded that limited analysis of the human remains is necessary because they are the only evidence of the unique Early Archaic occupation at the site. This means that questions important to the prehistory of this country cannot be answered without direct analysis of the remains and associated mortuary materials.

The Corps plans to analyze all human remains and archeological materials from the site, and then make the remains available for reburial as soon as possible. Observations and measurements of the skeletal remains will be performed to obtain information on the age, height and sex of the individuals as well as information on general health, disease and, in some cases, cause of death.

But there are some types of critical information that cannot be obtained without taking small samples of bone for analysis. This information includes the age of the burials, the genetic relationships among individuals in the cemetery and the possible migration of these people. To obtain this information, radiocarbon dating, stable isotope analysis and DNA analysis will be performed.

“All of the skeletal remains will not be sampled as recommended by some of the archeological interests,” said Janelle Stokes, Corps archeologist leading the project. “Because of concerns expressed by the consulting Native American tribes and, out of respect for the human remains, the number of samples obtained for destructive analysis has been limited to the amount necessary to obtain statistically valid results. The human remains and associated mortuary goods will be released for eventual reburial at the site of origin.”

The site was found near the Channel to Victoria, an existing shallow-draft navigation channel that has been deepened and widened by the US Army Corps of Engineers. The archeological site is located on property owned by DuPont Textiles and Interiors. DuPont is the owner of the site, and steward of all recovered remains and materials.

More information on the analysis plan and the archeological site can be obtained from the Corps website at <http://www.swg.usace.army.mil>.